

"The income derived from coconut products is insufficient to meet the demands of a growing family... another possible source of income is goat raising. For milk alone, starting with two does and a buck at the rate of 1/2 liter per day from 100 to 200 days, family needs could be supplied."



# If I Were A Coconut Planter

By FRANCISCO D. MARQUEZ  
*Administrative Officer, Department of  
Agriculture and Commerce*

COCONUT, variously described as "God's best gift to the Filipinos", "the brown man's burden"<sup>(1)</sup>, and the "lazy man's crop", once had its heyday. There was a time when it was nursed and patted, like the legendary golden calf. Why not? It was turning raw nuts into gold in the fashion of King Midas.

Much of that boom is now but a faint memory of by-gone years. People in Laguna and Tayabas and of other coconut regions are still fond of recalling the days of the early twenties when fortunes were being made by men who did nothing but to literally watch their coconut palms grow and bear fruit. A little bit shop-worn but still vivid are the stories of how a man-about-town of San Pablo, Laguna, used to go around with rolls of coconut money and how he awed people by lighting his cigar with crisp twenty-peso bills, or who, on occasions, used to drop his diamond ring on the floor merely to attract notice. Coconut then was the Philippines No. 1 commodity and these coconut planters were then having plenty of fun with their fortunes.

But, as already stated, much of that is now nothing but of the past. Like most things in this world, coconut has its up and downs.

The coconut industry, as early as ten years ago, began its disheartening toboggan. It has been tobogganing since then, leaving in its path a coterie of disheartened planters who did not have the foresight to realize that coconut depends entirely upon a very fickle foreign market.

The history, and the heartaches of that toboggan, may be gleaned from the following statistical data:

In 1920, or thereabouts, coconut sold at from ₱90 or even ₱100 per thousand nuts. Today, it is selling only at ₱11 per thousand nuts. One or two years

back, it was selling at only ₱2.50 per thousand—and planters preferred to watch their nuts fall to the ground rather than bear the expenses of gathering.

The case of copra is just as dismal. What used to sell (Buen Corriente) at ₱32 per 100 kilos way back in 1918 and 1919, sell today for only ₱7 per 100 kilos.

All these are stark realities and form part of the lessons which the years have taught our coconut planters. If I were a coconut planter—and I am as such as one because I have taken the cause of the coconut planter at heart. — I would not be depressed over present conditions. Of course, having set a standard of living for myself and for my family, and having enjoyed a few luxuries during the days of plenty, it will be difficult for me to adjust myself to a new set of conditions. I have children to send to school. I have a duty to them and to myself. I shall therefore make an effort to improve not only my own economic position but also that of the community in which I live. For this reason, I would lay down for myself a rigid personal program.

Having lived the best years of my life on a coconut plantation as a coconut planter, and not having the courage to hew down my coconut trees for reasons both sentimental and practical, I shall stick to my own farm and improve my plantation. I shall draw from my past experiences and nevermore commit the same errors I committed in the past. I am now richer in experience, if not in money, and I know I shall be able to conquer those odds which beset every planter who, in the past, had the mistake of not thinking twice.

<sup>(1)</sup> Jim Marshall in "Collier's"



"Trees attacked by coconut bud-rot should be immediately removed... bud-rot-infested trees will not continue to produce fruits."

There is a patent need for getting the most profit out of one's coconut plantation. Coconuts, like most agricultural plants of the Philippines, could be made to yield the maximum number of nuts through scientific cultivation. The Government, as every coconut planter knows, has extended aids along this line. The result of years of experimentation and study of our Government experts are available today, unlike twenty years ago, to every coconut planter who wishes to draw from his plantation the maximum yield. If I were a coconut planter therefore, I shall not be indifferent — as many coconut planters still are — to the efforts of our Government in this direction. I shall not hesitate to consult the officials of the Bureau of Plant Industry of the Department of Agriculture and Commerce on my problems, particularly in checking the damages of insect pests and diseases which are constantly at work in my coconut trees. Coconut beetles commonly called "Uang" and leaf-miner cause much damage to trees. Trees attacked by coconut-budrot should immediately be removed not only in compliance with Government order but also because they are very dangerous to the rest of my coconut trees. Besides, a bud-rot infected tree will not continue to produce fruits. Every coconut tree that is affected by bud-rot is a focus of infection of 10-15 surrounding trees in one year. Therefore, I shall willingly follow the order of the government to have it cut down and burned. Then also, I shall resort to a more scientific method of taking care of my plantation not only in keeping away all unnecessary weeds that rob my plants of food elements but also in planting cover-crops which not only enrich the farm but also prevent the washing away of the soil and its fertility in the form of erosion. If my

plantation is flat and low and susceptible to water-logging, which is often manifested by the stunted growth of my coconut trees and yellowing of leaves, I shall try to provide proper drainage by digging canals all around for the purpose. In other words, I shall look into the proper development of my coconut plants so as to make them yield for me the maximum and at the same time expect them to be productive for a longer period of time. But I shall not confine my efforts to coconut production alone.

Every coconut planter has his own bitter pill to take, and one of them, to our recollection, happened way back in 1928 and 1929.

Just as we were dreamily brooding on the boom years and just as we were elatedly expecting the promised "better day around the corner," a new plant pest, the leaf miner descended upon us and wrought havoc in our plantations. The Government immediately came to our rescue to eradicate the pests spending over half a million pesos — and spared no efforts to save our coconut to which we coconut planters must all be grateful to this day. This disaster, if we can call it a disaster, proved to be a blessing in disguise to us for it made us wake up to the realization of the fallacy of one-crop system and the wisdom of "putting our eggs in more than one basket." Since then, coconut planters in certain regions of Tayabas and Laguna have started planting secondary crops to supplement their pest-infested coconut farms. The lesson was bitter but the result is sweet.

I shall no longer be a prey to usurers and Chinese middlemen. Profits in every merchandise sold through a middleman, go to that middleman and not to the producer. I shall avail myself of the services of the National Produce Exchange which is under the management of the Director of Commerce which, I understand, has all the facilities for handling goods direct from farmers. Or, I shall engage in a direct sale of my nuts for the desiccator or for food or for copra making. I shall also avail myself of the facilities of the National Coconut Corporation, a recently organized government agency intended to take care of the welfare and interest principally of the coconut planters. I shall take advantage of the services being rendered along improved copra production by using improved copra driers and the utilization of other coconut by-products and therefore properly utilize coconut husks and coconut shells which are being thrown away as wastes in many coconut plantations of the Philippines. I shall run my farm in the modern, model way and see to it that coconut by-products are not wasted. I shall join cooperative associations of coconut growers that have been organized or help organize one in my community for the purpose of enhancing or improving our economic welfare. Through an association of this nature, we can poll together our resources and energies in securing credit aids from the Agricultural and Industrial Bank or other banking institutions instead of becoming easy prey to unscrupulous money lenders. Through the same institution we could estab-

(Please turn to page 10)

## IF I WERE A COCONUT...

*(Continued from page 8)*

lish cooperative stores wherefrom we could buy our daily needs and other necessities at a much lower price. These may include different foodstuffs, clothes and even the implements needed on our farm work.

In view of the increasing necessities of a growing family I shall try to look for other sources of livelihood and for the education of my children not now possible from purely coconut income. I shall therefore resort to diversification of crops and animal products. For this purpose, the assistance of the Bureau of Plant Industry and Animal Industry will be needed. I have learned that there are now found many kinds of money crops both temporary as well as permanent that could be raised. I have seen during my trips to neighboring provinces that a number of coconut farmers among others, now successfully grow bananas, lanzones and mangosteens planted between coconut trees. All of these are now giving appreciable incomes to those who have them. As for temporary crops, I also see that camote, ginger and arrow-roots are grown successfully and even rice, corn and many kinds of vegetables. All available vacant spaces and open fields will henceforth be devoted to those crops if I ever expect to survive the pressing economic necessities being brought about by the changing economic conditions. I am now convinced that the income derived from coconut products is insufficient to meet the demands of a growing family even with the return of normal prices of copra and raw coconut products.

But I shall not be satisfied with that. I have also learned that animal products could be readily raised. The Director of Animal Industry now tells us that by starting with 2 sows or female pigs with one boar I can reasonably expect 20 small pigs after two breeding years. The food for these will only consist of coconuts supplemented with camote, corn and domestic refuse. I can readily imagine how much additional income I can derive from 20 litters sold at a minimum of ₱5 each of the improved breeds. They will only need around 60 to 100 square meters of ground of my farm. Another possible source of income is goat raising. For milk alone, starting with two does and a buck at the rate of 1/2 liter per day from 100 to 200 days, family needs could be supplied. Meat is likewise available. Then the raising of chicken comes in. Starting with 12 hens and 2 roosters one could readily have in a comparatively short time 1,000 chickens consisting of 600 layers and 400 for replacements. For egg pro-

duction alone this number could readily produce over 300 eggs daily. The chicken meat will be available from culled ones. Feed is not also expensive as it can consist merely of corn—darak, etc.—which can partly be raised in my own farm. I shall do all these because I have a primary duty towards my family—to my wife and to my children who should all go to school—and to the community in which I live. I shall not be a drag to the economic progress of my country. On the contrary, I shall exert all efforts to aid in the difficult task of building our nation's economy.

Reverses in the market will not daunt me. Neither has it daunted other coconut planters. This is borne out by the following facts: There has been a steady increase of hectareage planted to coconut. In 1934, only 608,200 hectares were planted to coconut. In 1938, this has increased to 643,110. There has also been an increase in the total number of trees planted, as well as in the total number of trees bearing fruits. In 1934, only 74,372,100 trees were bearing fruits; in 1938, the figure was upped to 91,178,800. The total value of production has increased from ₱27,146,650 in 1934 to ₱92,126,490 in 1938, or a gross income per hectare from ₱69.62 to ₱191.13.



Francisco D. Marquez  
author of this article

The coconut is an important world commodity, and I should not be blamed if I had staked my own life and lot in its production. It must be understood that Philippine copra production represents approximately 34 per cent of the world's consumption of this commodity. It also represents 27% of the Philippine yearly export. In a recent report on the vital defense needs of America Secretary Frank Knox of the U. S. Navy said: "Coconut shell charcoal is used in the manufacture of gas masks. We have no production of this necessary material, importing most of our supplies from the Philippines."

Would you blame me, therefore, if my spirit refuses to yield to any other temptation? I still believe I can work out satisfactorily my economic salvation.